



AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-34 (Canceled)

35. (Currently Amended) A surgical retractor system for creating an opening through an incision in a patient comprising:

a drive mechanism having first and second members extending therefrom, said first member being moveable, via said drive mechanism, relative to said second member; and

at least one of said members comprising at least one suture stay having an open slot for receiving free end portions of a suture and a substantially rigid suture lock movably mounted with respect to said open slot and adapted to move away from a side of said slot as an end portion of the suture is pulled into the slot, said suture lock moving against said side of said slot to press said end portion against said side of said slot thereby preventing said end portion from moving within said slot.

36. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 35, further comprising a biasing member for biasing said suture lock against said side of said slot, and wherein said suture lock is mounted in a recess adjacent said open slot and extends out of said recess and into said open slot.

37. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 35, wherein at least one of said first and second members comprises a plurality of said suture stays and said suture locks.

38. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 37, wherein each of said first and second members comprises a plurality of said suture stays and said suture locks.

39. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 35, wherein said at least one suture stay having a suture lock is removable from the retractor system.

40. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 37, wherein said plurality of said suture stays and said suture locks are removable from the retractor system.

41. (Canceled) Please cancel claim 41 without prejudice to filing one or more continuing applications directed to the subject matter recited therein.

42. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 35, wherein each said suture stay and suture lock is recessed into said respective member, allowing another instrument to be mounted or passed thereover.

43. (Previously Presented) The surgical retractor system of claim 36, wherein said biasing member comprises a piece of resilient foam placed between said suture lock and a wall of said recess.

44. (Currently Amended) The retractor system of claim 35, wherein said substantially rigid suture lock is angled at an acute angle with respect to said side of said slot when said suture lock is moved away from said side, making said suture lock self-locking in one direction.

45. (Previously Presented) The retractor system of claim 35, wherein said suture lock comprises teeth or ridges on an end which contacts said side of said slot, to ensure acceptable traction against said end portions.

46. (Canceled) Please cancel claim 46 without prejudice to filing one or more continuing applications directed to the subject matter recited therein...

47. (Canceled) Please cancel claim 47 without prejudice to filing one or more continuing applications directed to the subject matter recited therein..

48. (Canceled) Please cancel claim 48 without prejudice to filing one or more continuing applications directed to the subject matter recited therein..

49. (Previously Presented) The retractor system of claim 45, where each of said first and second members comprises an elongate rail oriented along at least a portion of a length thereof, and each of said first and second members comprises a plurality of said suture stays and suture locks recessed in said respective rails.

50. (Previously Presented) The retractor system of claim 49, wherein each said rail extends from said respective member and forms a T-shaped cross-section.

51. (Currently Amended) A suture stay adapted for use in a surgical retractor system, said suture stay being adapted to receive free end portions of surgical suture and retain the suture under tension, said suture stay comprising:

an open slot for receiving a free end portion of the suture and a suture lock movably mounted with respect to said open slot and adapted to move away from a side of said slot while remaining substantially undeformed as the free end portion of the suture is pulled into the slot, said suture lock being biased against said side of said slot to press said free end portion against said side of said slot thereby preventing said free end portion from moving within said slot.

52. (Previously Presented) The suture stay of claim 51, further comprising a biasing member for biasing said suture lock against said side of said slot, and wherein said suture lock is adapted to be mounted in a recess adjacent said open slot and extends out of said recess and into said open slot.

53. (Previously Presented) The suture stay of claim 51, wherein said suture stay is adapted to be removably mounted to the surgical retractor system.

54. (Currently Amended) An array of suture stays adapted for use in a surgical retractor system, each said suture stay being adapted to receive free end portions of a surgical suture and retain the suture under tension, each said suture stay comprising:

an open slot for receiving a free end portion of the suture and a suture lock movably mounted with respect to said open slot and adapted to pivot ~~move~~ away from a side of said slot as the end portion of the surgical suture is pulled into the slot, said suture lock moving against said side of said slot to press said free end portion against said side of said slot thereby preventing said free end portion from moving within said slot.

55. (Previously Presented) The array of claim 54, wherein said array is adapted to be removably mounted to the surgical retractor system.

56. (Previously Presented) The array of claim 55, wherein said suture stays are located in a retractor arm extending from a retractor mechanism of the surgical retractor system.

57. (Canceled) Please cancel claim 57 without prejudice to filing one or more continuing applications directed to the subject matter recited therein..

58. (New) A suture stay adapted for use in a surgical retractor system, said suture stay being adapted to receive free end portions of a surgical suture and retain the suture under tension, said suture stay comprising:

a primary slot section adapted to receive multiple free end suture portions;

multiple secondary slot sections extending from said primary slot section, each secondary slot section adapted to receive a free end suture portion; and

a suture lock movably mounted with respect to one of said slot sections and adapted to move away from a side of said slot as the free end portion of the suture is pulled into the slot section, said suture lock being biased against a side of said slot section to press said free end portion against said side of said slot section thereby preventing said free end portion from moving within said slot section.

59. (New) The suture stay of claim 58, wherein said primary slot section bifurcates into two said secondary slot sections.

60. (New) The suture stay of claim 58, further comprising a biasing member for biasing said suture lock against said side of said slot section, and wherein said suture lock is adapted to be mounted in a recess adjacent said slot section and extends out of said recess and into said slot section.

61. (New) The suture stay of claim 58, wherein said suture lock is mounted with respect to said primary slot section to lock sutures against said side of said primary slot section.

62. (New) The suture stay of claim 58, wherein one of said suture locks is mounted with respect to each said secondary slot section, respectively, providing locking control over individual suture ends received within each said secondary slot.

63. (New) The suture stay of claim 58, wherein said suture stay is adapted to be removably mounted to a surgical retractor system.